

Memorandum

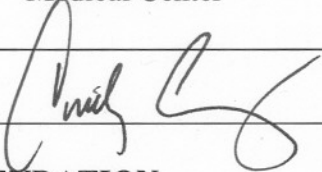
TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember Chavez

SUBJECT: Closure of San José
Medical Center

DATE: October 5, 2004

Approved



Date

Oct 5, 2004

RECOMMENDATION

- The Mayor and City Council direct the Mayor to send the attached letter to HCA that outlines the City's response to the closure of the San José Medical Center and the City's proposed transition strategy to protect the public health and safety;
- Begin Council discussion regarding the future of the SJMC site.

BACKGROUND

The City of San José is committed to ensuring that quality health care is accessible to all of its citizens. Approximately two years ago, the Hospital Corporation of America made known its long-term plans to close the San José Medical Center in 2007. In an effort to create a successful five-year transition strategy that would protect our residents and mitigate the potential health and safety impacts caused by a SJMC closure, the City partnered with Santa Clara County to jointly fund a health care study regarding the potential impacts of closure and the medical services needs of the downtown area.

The Strong Neighborhoods Initiative 13th Street Neighborhood Advisory Council also began a collaborative effort in order to defend its sixth priority on its SNI Top 10 list: to ensure the availability of medical services, especially through the retention of hospital, emergency room and trauma care services in their area. A grassroots group known as the Save SJMC Coalition now includes the 13th Street NAC and several other neighborhood organizations dedicated to protecting their access to health care in the downtown area.

On September 9, 2004, HCA suddenly announced its decision to close SJMC in 90 days, breaching its commitment to its prior closure schedule. At that time the \$100,000 joint health care study was not yet complete, and the opportunity to design a safe, conscientious transition strategy was truncated. The City has sought to understand the public health and safety impacts, both on residents and on related City service delivery workers, which will result from this dramatic change in timeframe.

Using the preliminary findings of the health care study as well as information from a series of internal meetings with the Police and Fire Departments and the Office of Emergency Services, the City is now considering the impacts on our community and our public safety services that would result from the sudden closure of SJMC. This information raises the following concerns for the well-being of community residents:

From the Preliminary San José Medical Center Closure Study conducted by Henry W. Zaretsky & Associates, Inc.:

- Service gaps for trauma care and transportation to alternative health care facilities, particularly for the elderly and indigent, remain critical issues.
- The downtown San José population is a high growth area.
- The population in the downtown area is aging. There is a marked increase in the demand for health care services among those over the age of 45, particularly among those over age 65.
- The community residents, particularly the senior citizens and indigent, are fearful of the loss of a trusted, nearby care facility and lack transportation to alternative health care.
- The preliminary study finds that if one third of SJMC patients are absorbed by Regional, it will be almost at capacity by 2005. The loss of general care beds due to the SJMC closure without the expansion of Regional risks the safety of residents and reduces the availability health care.
- Ninety-five per cent of the patients in SJMC come from within Santa Clara County; only five per cent of patients are out-of-county residents.
- There will be a shortage of Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds in Santa Clara County due to SJMC closing.
- Residents as well as visitors to the City of San José for big events and conventions that occur in the downtown will experience reduced accessibility to health and safety services.

From the Police and Fire Departments:

- Six months is the minimum standard time frame for a company to develop a new deployment plan for firefighters and emergency service workers. Emergency companies will grapple with impacts on their response times, as they will be out of service longer due to the longer drive times.
- The police also require time to effectively reconfigure the officers' stations and shifts in order to accommodate units being on task longer due to increased drive time to Regional. Throughout this transition process they must also be careful to comply with established labor contracts.
- Sixty-five per cent of the call volume is in the downtown and east side jurisdictions of Santa Clara County. These calls often involve critical, time sensitive health and safety needs of the residents and require nearby trauma services.

From the Office of Emergency Services (Disaster Readiness and Emergency Preparedness):

- The loss of beds due to the SJMC closure simultaneously risks the safety and well being of San José residents while reducing the accessibility and availability health care.
- One trauma center in a population of one million is inadequate for expected epidemiology such as car wrecks and individual accidents. The response time for heart attack victims will be jeopardized.

- The East Side has a history of severe trauma cases, including gunshots, knife wounds and freeway accidents.
- In the case of a major disaster such as an earthquake, San José cannot rely on Stanford Medical Center for trauma services, which also serves San Mateo County. Only Valley Medical Center will be available, and it will be pushed beyond its capacity in the event of a catastrophic earthquake. Projections indicate that by 2030 there is a 70% chance of a severe earthquake on the southern Hayward Fault.
- San José needs an accessible, centrally located area to treat residents in the event of a major disaster, including earthquakes, weapons of mass destruction, or bomb explosions.

Based on these critical public health, safety, and service delivery concerns as well as a strong public outcry to the accelerated closure timeline, I recommend City Council approval of the request outlined in the letter that accompanies this memo: SJMC should remain open and fully operative until a conscientious public health and safety plan is developed. This plan must include at least *six months* for the reconfiguration of police, fire and emergency squad routes as well as *any additional time* required for Regional Medical Center to become properly certified as a trauma center. At a minimum, HCA must fulfill its clear responsibility to the people of our community by ensuring that a certified Regional Trauma Center opens before the SJMC Trauma Center closes.

The City recommends this plan in order to successfully mitigate the most critical impacts threatening the health and safety of our community. It simultaneously preserves two trauma centers in San Jose while ensuring sufficient time for the San José Police and Fire Departments as well as the Office of Emergency Services to create new health, safety and disaster preparedness strategies.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Over the past two years, the Save SJMC Coalition, the 13th Street NAC, and other neighborhood associations have collaboratively hosted numerous community meetings. On September 23, 2004, the 13th Street NAC and the Save SJMC Coalition held a community meeting regarding the sudden closure of SJMC. Over 150 concerned community members attended, including residents, SJMC doctors, downtown pharmacy and health care-related storeowners, teachers, County health officials, representatives from Councilmembers Cindy Chavez and Nora Campos offices as well as Councilmember Cindy Chavez and Assembly member Manny Diaz.

In addition there was a Community Forum sponsored by Councilmembers Cindy Chavez and Nora Campos on Monday, October 4, 2004, for concerned citizens to directly ask questions of or make comments to HCA officials about their decisions regarding SJMC and Regional Medical Center. Approximately 300 people attended this forum. The delay in circulating this memo was due to a desire to incorporate community feedback from this forum into both the memo and accompanying letter.

DRAFT LETTER TO HCA FROM MAYOR RON GONZALES

I have been directed by the San Jose City Council to send this letter on behalf of the residents of our city. It is with grave concern that the City of San José received the announcement last month from the Hospital Corporation of America of its intention to close San José Medical Center, currently home for one of only three trauma centers in Santa Clara County, within ninety days.

HCA's decision to close SJMC in ninety days when it had publicly promised a 2007 date represents a serious breach of its commitment to the protection of our residents.

We recognize that HCA had long-term plans to close SJMC, and the City partnered with Santa Clara County to jointly fund a study of the potential health and safety impacts related to closure and of the need for medical services in our downtown area. This collaborative effort, working with the original closure timeline provided by HCA, was part of a plan designed to protect the well being of community residents as well as public safety, health, and emergency workers. At the time of the closure announcement in September, this study was not yet completed and unavailable as a resource for coordinated public health and safety decision-making.

Moreover, there existed a shared understanding between the community and HCA that the company would expand its other local hospital, Regional Medical Center, with plans to relocate a trauma center in East San Jose. While our concern regarding the loss of a downtown hospital and trauma center still remains high, the City also strongly believes that HCA has a duty for public safety for our entire community to ensure that the Regional Trauma Center will be open before the SJMC Trauma Center closes.

HCA's ninety-day announcement has created an arbitrary deadline that puts our community at risk, and it has foreclosed our collaborative efforts to plan for a safe and effective transition. Regional is not prepared or officially certified to house a trauma center within ninety days. This lack of coordination by HCA is unacceptable and dangerous as it jeopardizes the health and safety of residents in Santa Clara County and the surrounding areas. Therefore, we urge HCA to immediately prepare for and begin the certification process required for a trauma center at Regional so that the closure of SJMC and its trauma center does not leave our people without protection.

While this certification process is underway, SJMC should remain open and fully operative until a realistic public health and safety plan is completed that includes a certified trauma center at Regional Medical Center and suitable medical services that meet the needs of downtown San Jose. This would mitigate the serious potential impacts that threaten the health and safety of the community by preserving two trauma centers in San Jose and three in the South Bay while ensuring time for the San José Police and Fire Departments as well as the Office of Emergency Services to create new health, safety and disaster preparedness strategies.

The following issues underscore the need for the additional time included in the aforementioned strategy:

- Six months is the minimum time frame to develop a new deployment plan for firefighters and emergency service workers. Emergency response companies will grapple with impacts on their response times because they will be out of service longer due to the longer drive times to Regional.

- Police require time to reconfigure officer assignments and shifts in order to accommodate units being on task longer due to increased drive time to Regional. Throughout this transition process police must also be careful to comply with established labor contracts.
- The preliminary findings of the closure impact study find that if one third of SJMC patients are absorbed by Regional, it will be almost at capacity by 2005. The loss of general care beds due to the SJMC closure without the expansion of Regional risks the safety of residents and reduces the availability health care to the entire community.
- If Regional does not have adequate time to properly prepare for additional patients, there will be a shortage of Intensive Care Unit beds in Santa Clara County due to SJMC's closing.
- One trauma center for a San Jose population of nearly one million residents is inadequate for major incidents such as car wrecks and individual accidents that occur in this city. Without a second trauma center in the city, the response time for victims of fires and heart attacks will also be jeopardized and potentially contributing to loss of lives.
- In the case of a major disaster such as an earthquake, San José cannot rely on only two trauma centers in the county. Within the next 25 years there is a 70% chance of a catastrophic earthquake in this area. Without a trauma center operating at Regional, Valley Medical Center and Stanford would be taxed far beyond their capacities to meet the critical emergency medical needs of the South Bay and our neighboring communities.

These potential health and safety impacts will be mitigated if SJMC remains open until Regional Medical Center is expanded and certified as a trauma center. The City of San José urges HCA to follow this strategy now and work with the City, the County, and our community in order to protect the health, safety and well being of nearly two million residents of San Jose, Silicon Valley, and our neighboring cities.

As follow-up to this letter, I am requesting a meeting with the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of HCA, Jack O. Bovender Jr., in order to discuss this important matter in more detail.

Sincerely,

Ron Gonzales
Mayor

cc: City Council
County of Santa Clara

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